

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 19908

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SUBJECT: MINDANAO CEASEFIRE AND AGREEMENT WITH MNLF

REF: (A) MANILA 19834; (B) MANILA 19774

SUMMARY: DURING DECEMBER 27 NEWS CONFERENCE PRESIDENT
MARCOS EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE GOP AND MNLF PANELS IN TRIPOLI
HAD REACHED AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE WHICH WILL END MINDANAO
SECESSION PROBLEM. PRESIDENT HAS ORDERED MINDANAO CEASE-
FIRE. GOP AND MNLF WILL MEET FEBRUARY 5 TO CONCLUDE
NEGOTIATIONS. GOP WILL GRANT "AUTONOMY" TO ALL 13
ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS IN THE COUNTRY BEGINNING WITH
MINDANAO AND SULU. DESPITE MARCOS' OPTIMISM, IT REMAINS
TO BE SEEN EXACTLY WHAT KIND OF AUTONOMY GOP PREPARED
OFFER AND WHETHER IT WILL BE ACCEPTABLE TO MNLF. GOP HAS
GONE FARTHER OUT ON LIMB ON PEACE PROSPECTS THAN ON PREVIOUS
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OCCASIONS. THUS, POSSIBILITY OF SEVERE EMBARRASSMENT FOR
GOP AND COMPLICATION OF ITS RELATIONS WITH ISLAMIC WORLD
SEEMS CONSIDERABLY GREATER SHOULD CURRENT PEACE EFFORT FAIL.
END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT MARCOS HELD TELEVISED NEWS CONFERENCE AT

NOON TODAY (DECEMBER 27) TO DISCUSS NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN MNLF AND GOP IN TRIPOLI. MARCOS EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT FINAL AGREEMENT COULD BE REACHED IN NEGOTIATIONS RESUMING FEBRUARY 5 AND THAT COLONEL QADHAFI WOULD ATTEND APRIL SIGNING CEREMONY IN MANILA. IN Q AND A, HOWEVER, MARCOS ADMITTED THAT THERE ONLY "TENTATIVE AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE" AND THAT SITUATION "COULD BLOW UP AGAIN EVEN NOW." PRESIDENT MAINTAINED AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE A GENUINE COMPROMISE WITH EACH SIDE HAVING TO ACCEPT THINGS IT DIDN'T LIKE. MARCOS WAS LAVISH IN PRAISING COLONEL QADHAFI'S INTERVENTIONS DURING DECISIVE STAGES OF NEGOTIATIONS CLAIMING THAT TALKS HAD BEEN ON VERGE OF BREAKING DOWN DECEMBER 21 OVER AREA TO BE DESIGNATED IN CEASEFIRE COMMUNIQUE (13 PROVINCES IN MINDANAO-NOT ALL MINDANAO). THIS WAS THE DIFFICULT TENTH POINT MARCOS REFERRED TO IN AN ARMED FORCES DAY SPEECH (SEE REFTELS).

2. IN ADDITION TO AGREEING ON AREAS WHICH MAY CONSTITUTE MUSLIM AUTONOMOUS REGION, PANELS AGREED ON ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL LEGISLATURE, SPECIAL MUSLIM COURTS AND REGIONAL SECURITY FORCES. PRESIDENT WAS UNCLEAR ON HOW REGIONAL SECURITY FORCES WOULD INTERFACE WITH AFP, BUT EMPHASIZED THEY WOULD NOT CONSTITUTE SEPARATE ARMED FORCE. MARCOS SAID THAT IN ADDITION TO PRESIDENTIAL DECREES ESTABLISHING SEPARATE MUSLIM COURTS THERE WILL HAVE TO BE PLEBISCITE IN PROVINCES AFFECTED. NEWSMAN POINTED OUT THAT MUSLIMS CONSTITUTED MAJORITY IN ONLY A FEW MINDANAO PROVINCES AND ASKED WHETHER THESE WOULD NOT BE ONLY PROVINCES WHICH WOULD OPT FOR NEW AUTONOMOUS

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SETUP. PRESIDENT DECLINED SPECULATE BUT SAID NUMBER OF MUSLIM INHABITANTS OF MINDANAO SULU NUMBERED 2 MILLION, NOT 3.5 MILLION CLAIMED BY MNLF. PRESIDENT ALSO SAID NO DECISION HAD BEEN MADE ON BRINGING MNLF LEADERSHIP INTO GOVERNMENT.

3. ON DECEMBER 24, MARCOS HAD ORDERED CESSATION OF ALL MILITARY OPERATIONS IN SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES IN ACCORDANCE WITH AN AGREEMENT REACHED BETWEEN GOP REPRESENTATIVES AND MORO NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (MNLF) IN TRIPOLI DECEMBER 23. REPRESENTATIVES FROM AFP AND MNLF WILL SUPERVISE CEASEFIRE IN EACH PROVINCE. OBSERVERS FROM ISLAMIC CONFERENCE WILL ALSO BE ASKED ASSIST SUPERVISING OF CEASEFIRE. ON DECEMBER 25, PRESIDENT MARCOS HAD TOLD PRESS THAT WHILE GOP AND MNLF HAVE AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO END CONFLICT IN SOUTH, DETAILS STILL HAD TO BE WORKED OUT. MARCOS SAID REPRESENTATIVES OF MNLF WOULD MEET IN TRIPOLI FROM FEBRUARY 5 TO MARCH 3 "TO WORK OUT THE DETAILS OF THE

FORMAL AGREEMENT" WHICH WOULD BE SIGNED IN MANILA IN APRIL IN PRESENCE OF COLONEL QADHAFI. THE PRESIDENT SAID ALL OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY (13) STARTING WITH MINDANAO WOULD COME UNDER AUTONOMOUS REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE. EACH AUTONOMOUS REGION WOULD HAVE A LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WHICH WOULD NOMINATE AN EXECUTIVE COUNCIL TO BE APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT. THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO EXERCISE CONTROL OF FOREIGN POLICY, NATIONAL DEFENSE, NATURAL RESOURCES, ETC.

5. COMMENT: IT WOULD APPEAR THAT ONLY THING DEFINITE DECIDED IN TRIPOLI WAS CEASEFIRE. THERE IS APPARENTLY AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE ON AUTONOMY ARRANGEMENT BUT ITS FINAL FORM MUST BE NEGOTIATED. MARCOS' ANNOUNCEMENT OF AUTONOMOUS MUSLIM REGION WITHIN THE PHILIPPINES WITH PROVISIONS FOR EXECUTIVE COUNCIL, LOCAL LEGISLATURE, COURTS, ETC. PRESUMABLY MEANT TO SATISFY MNLF'S REAL
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DESIRE FOR AUTONOMY. WHETHER IT WILL REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

6. IT IS INTERESTING THAT GOP, WHICH AVOIDED HAVING MNLF EVEN MENTIONED IN COMMUNIQUE WHEN MRS. MARCOS VISITED LIBYA (SEE MANILA 18243), AGREED TO INITIAL COMMUNIQUE WITH MNLF SPECIFIED AND TO ACCEPT MNLF IN CEASEFIRE INSPECTION TEAMS. THIS COMES RATHER CLOSE TO GRANTING MNLF BELLIGERENT STATUS AND CONTRADICTS GOP LINE THAT MNLF ONLY ONE SECESSIONIST ORGANIZATION AND DOES NOT SPEAK FOR ALL OF THE MUSLIMS IN MINDANAO. ACCEPTANCE OF MNLF MAY REFLECT PRESSURE FROM QADHAFI.

7. ONCE AGAIN THE GOP HAS DECLARED THAT PEACE IS AT HAND IN MINDANAO. THIS TIME, HOWEVER, THE STATEMENT IS MORE CATEGORICAL THAN ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS AND MARCOS HAS PUT HIS PRESTIGE ON THE LINE. THIS OPENS UP POSSIBILITY THAT GOP WILL BE SORELY EMBARRASSED AND ITS RELATIONS WITH ISLAMIC WORLD SEVERELY COMPLICATED IF CEASEFIRE AND PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BREAK DOWN. WE SHALL BE SEEKING APPOINTMENT WITH GOP PARTICIPANTS IN TALKS WITH MNLF ON THEIR RETURN FROM TRIPOLI TO OBTAIN CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF PROSPECTS FOR GENUINE SETTLEMENT OF MINDANAO CONFLICT BEFORE APRIL AND QADHAFI VISIT. OUR INITIAL REACTION, HOWEVER, IS THAT DESPITE OPTIMISTIC REPORTS AND JUBILANT ACCOUNTS OF CEASEFIRE IN GUIDED PRESS, MARCOS IS NOT YET OUT OF THE MINDANAO WOODS.
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